



Handle for adze or ice pick

On display

Title/Description: Handle for adze or ice pick

Accession Number: 1153a

Historic Period: Ipiutak (200-800 AD) (?)

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1997

The nose and mouth are broken on one side, but the shape of a creature's head (is it a seal?) can be distinguished on the handle part. The long neck or torso leads to a deep curvilinear line engraved into the bone (?) almost fully surrounds a hole. If the object had any further decorations then time has been unkind and has left it weathered.

Initially, this object was thought to be part of an engraving tool with the blade (UAE 1153b) attached to this. More recently, however, curators at SVCA have revised this and consider them both separately for good reasons as they certainly do not look like a good fit. What this object exactly is, however, leaves one to answer. In similar vein, although dated as Ipiutak (200-800 AD), there are not any similar objects found to my knowledge. We might assume that something was attached to the object and held together with rope. Perhaps a flint or slate blade? Perhaps it was a ice pick used for ice seal hunting? Is it a hunting knife? [1]

Peter Loovers, February 2022

[1] John Murdoch, 'Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition'. In Ninth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1887-'88, ed. by John W. Powell, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), (pp. 1-441) p. 216

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Miriam Shiell Fine Art, Toronto, in 1997 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
